卿爲誰死

The Two Wives of Wang

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The Two Wives of Wang

Based on a story in *Tales of Liaozhai* by Pu Songling

Text Lu Qing
Illustrations Gai Maosen
Book design Zhang Xizhu
Editor for English manuscripts Wang Xingzheng

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1. One day Wang Muzhen, a young man from a wealthy family, came upon an old lady who was crying bitterly. She told him that her son had been put in prison.

2. Wang Muzhen was kind and always ready to help others. He went to see the magistrate and asked for mercy for the old lady. As a result, her son was let out of the prison.

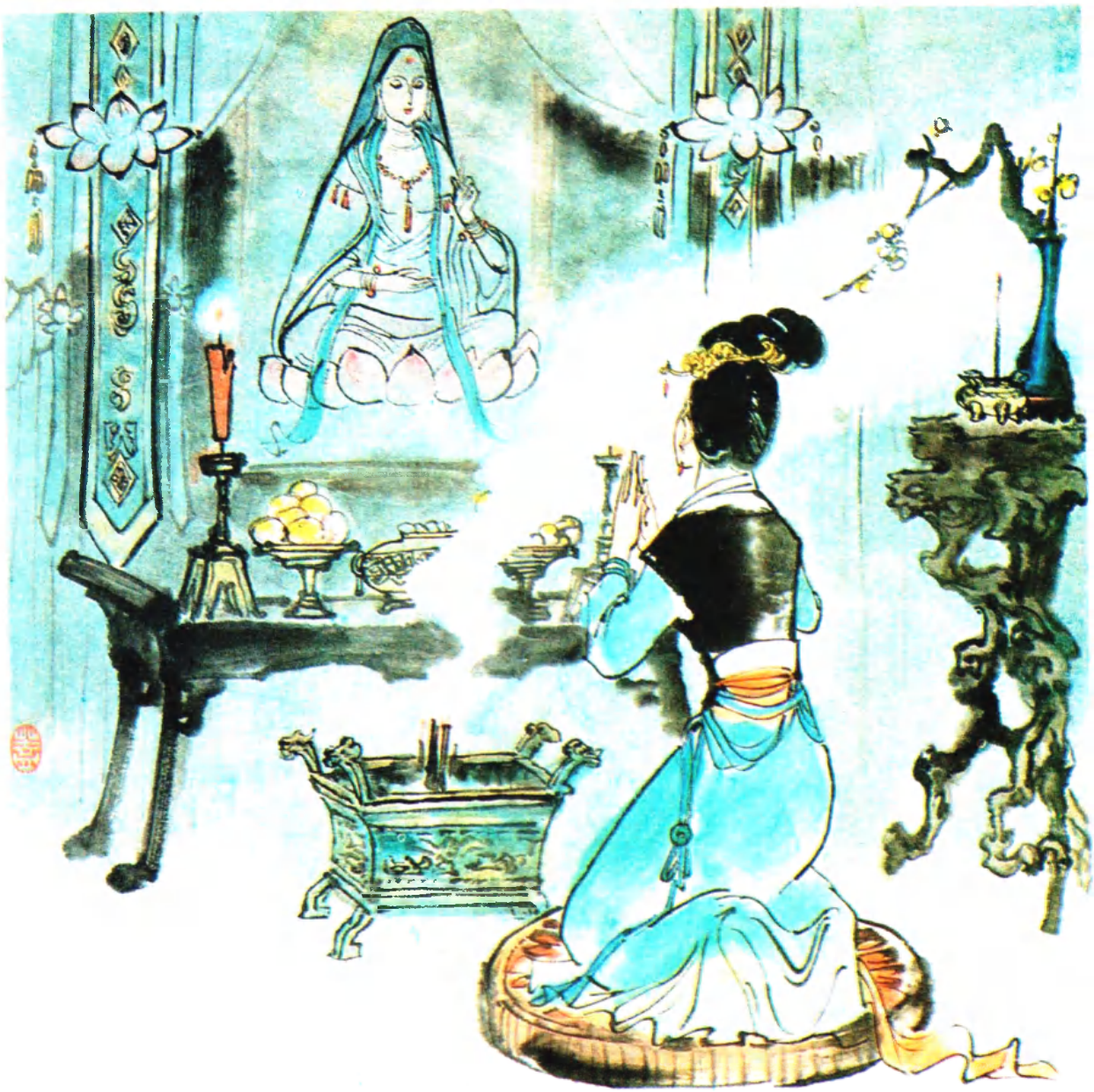
3. The released prisoner came to Wang Muzhen to express his gratitude. Asked why he was so helpful, Wang said, "I just sympathized with your mother in her loneliness."

4. "My mother?" cried the man. "But she died long ago!"
This threw Wang into bewilderment.

5. In the evening. the old lady also came to thank Wang.

"I'm an old fox spirit," she told him. "I asked you for help because I once fell in love with that man's father when I was young."

Having said this, the old lady disappeared.



6. Wang Muzhen had a wife, who longed for a son. She burned incense and prayed to *Guanyin* (a Bodhisattva) every day. Later she became ill, and moved her bed into a small room where the Bodhisattva's portrait was hung.

7. The illness of Wang's wife became worse and she was confined to bed for two whole years. From outside her room, Wang sometimes seemed to hear her talking with somebody, but when he opened the door, he could see nobody except his wife.

8. One day Wang's wife, in tears, told him, "I should have died two years ago. It is the Bodhisattva who has given me this extra time. She has also sent her own maid Little Mei to look after me. After my death, you can marry Little Mei."

9. Soon Mrs. Wang breathed her last breath, her finger pointing to the inner room. At night, people who kept vigil beside her coffin heard crying from that room. Opening the door, they saw a beautiful teenage girl sitting there dressed in mourning clothes.

10. Wang Muzhen bowed to the girl, saying, "If what my wife said is true, please come and meet my family."

11. A little shyly, Little Mei came into the sitting room, where she was greeted by the rest of Wang's family. Then she said to the servants, "Since the late madam trusted me with the running of the home, I'll take responsibility. I hope you'll all serve the master faithfully."

12. The servants promised they would. Little Mei then ordered them to prepare for Mrs. Wang's funeral.

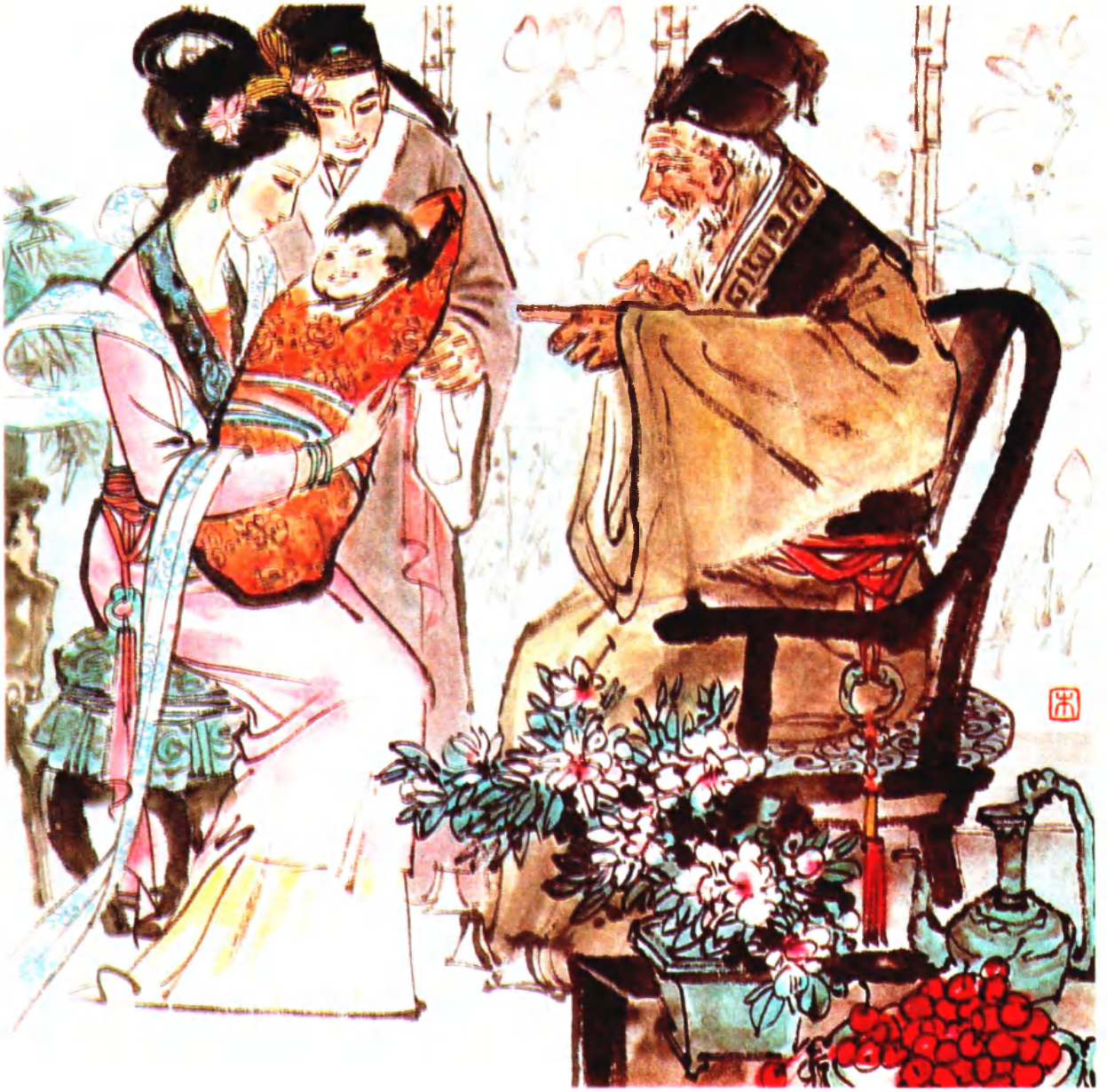
The servants were struck with awe when they noticed that Little Mei looked just like the Bodhisattva in the picture.

13. After the funeral, Wang Muzhen wanted to marry Little Mei, according to his wife's request. But Little Mei said, "Marriage is an important matter and should not be taken carelessly. If Huang Taipu agrees to preside over our wedding ceremony, I will marry you."

14. Huang Taipu, a close friend of Wang's father's, was well known for his good character. Wang immediately invited Huang to his house. On seeing Little Mei, Huang thought she was a goddess who had descended to the world. He agreed to preside over the wedding ceremony for the new couple.

15. Wang Muzhen showed special respect for his new wife, believing she was a goddess. But Little Mei said, "You're too silly. How can a goddess marry a human being?" Wang asked exactly who she was. Little Mei just smiled, giving no reply.

16. As Little Mei was kind and tolerant towards the servants, they all did their best for the family, which became even more prosperous several years later.



17. After a few more years, Little Mei gave birth to a boy who had a red mole on his left arm. Huang Taipu was invited to look at the mole. Considering it to be a good omen, Huang named the boy Lucky Red.

18. A carriage arrived unexpectedly one day to take Little Mei to her mother's home. Little Mei dressed herself carefully and took Lucky Red with her. She asked Wang to accompany her part of the way.

19. When the carriage arrived at a remote and quiet place many miles away, Little Mei stopped and said to her husband, "My darling, we are going to part forever." Astonished, Wang Muzhen asked desperately what was wrong.

20. "Actually, I'm daughter of the old fox spirt whom you helped once," said Little Mei. "I came to you to repay your kindness. Now luck has turned against me and I have to go into hiding with Lucky Red."

21. "After I leave," continued Little Mei, "if the family suffers from any disaster, please go to the Western Dam when the cock gives its first crow in the morning. There you'll see a man carrying sunflower lanterns on a shoulder pole, who will surely help you."

22. Wang Muzhen promised to do as told, and the couple wept as they said goodbye. Little Mei's carriage sped off like a puff of wind, and soon it was out of sight. Sadly, Wang got on his horse and went home.

23. Several years had passed and there was still no news about Little Mei. One year an epidemic struck the area where Wang lived, causing a heavy death toll. One of Wang's servants died of the disease.

24. Remembering what Little Mei said, Wang decided to ask the lantern man for help. Unfortunately, because he got drunk the night before, he woke up too late in the morning. When he arrived at the Western Dam, it was already bright day and the man he looked for had left. Wang ran after him but could not catch up.

25. Shortly after he returned home, Wang Muzhen died in the epidemic too. Seeing that Wang had no heir, some of his relatives, being rascals and gangsters, stole his farm animals and divided up his fields.

26. While they were doing this, a sedan chair entered the house. To everyone's surprise, Little Mei and her son Lucky Red were back.

27. Little Mei ordered her servants to lock the door and catch the bad relatives. The rascals tried to fight back, but they all became strangely weak and could not move. Little Mei had them tied to the pillars and then sent for Huang Taipu.

28. Huang made a list of the lost property and went to see the county magistrate, who ordered the arrest of the rascals. Each of the rascals was given a good beating and ordered to return what they had stolen from the Wang family.

29. When Huang Taipu was leaving for home, Little Mei and her son knelt in front of him. She entreated with sobs, "I do not belong to this world. All I can do is trust the boy to you."

30. Huang consented readily, "All right, so long as I'm alive, I'll protect Lucky Red."

31. After everything was settled, Little Mei left to visit her husband's grave. When she did not return after a long time, members of her family went to look for her. But Little Mei was no longer to be seen, only her offerings in front of Wang's tomb.

Pu Songling and *Tales of Liaozhai*

Pu Sonling (1640-1715) was a famous Chinese writer of the Qing Dynasty. Talented but melancholy, from childhood on he liked to read and travel with friends. Because he read at random and often indulged in imagination, he did not pass any imperial examination until he was 71. This meant disappointment and adversity for Pu, for the only way to rise in the world in his feudal society was to get an official post through the examination.

Pu Songling was a prolific writer, but it was *Tales of Liaozhai*, a collection of short stories, that established his reputation in the history of Chinese literature.

Written in a lucid, succinct style, the *Tales of Liaozhai* tell various strange stories about ghosts and spirits who understand society and human feelings. Some spirits are transformed into beautiful women, virtuous and passionate; others into men, honest and polite. The nether regions are described as being better than this world, and the spirits as superior to mortals. In this way, Pu Songling expressed his hatred and total negation of the society of his times, castigating the corrupt officials and rascals of all shades under feudalism.

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